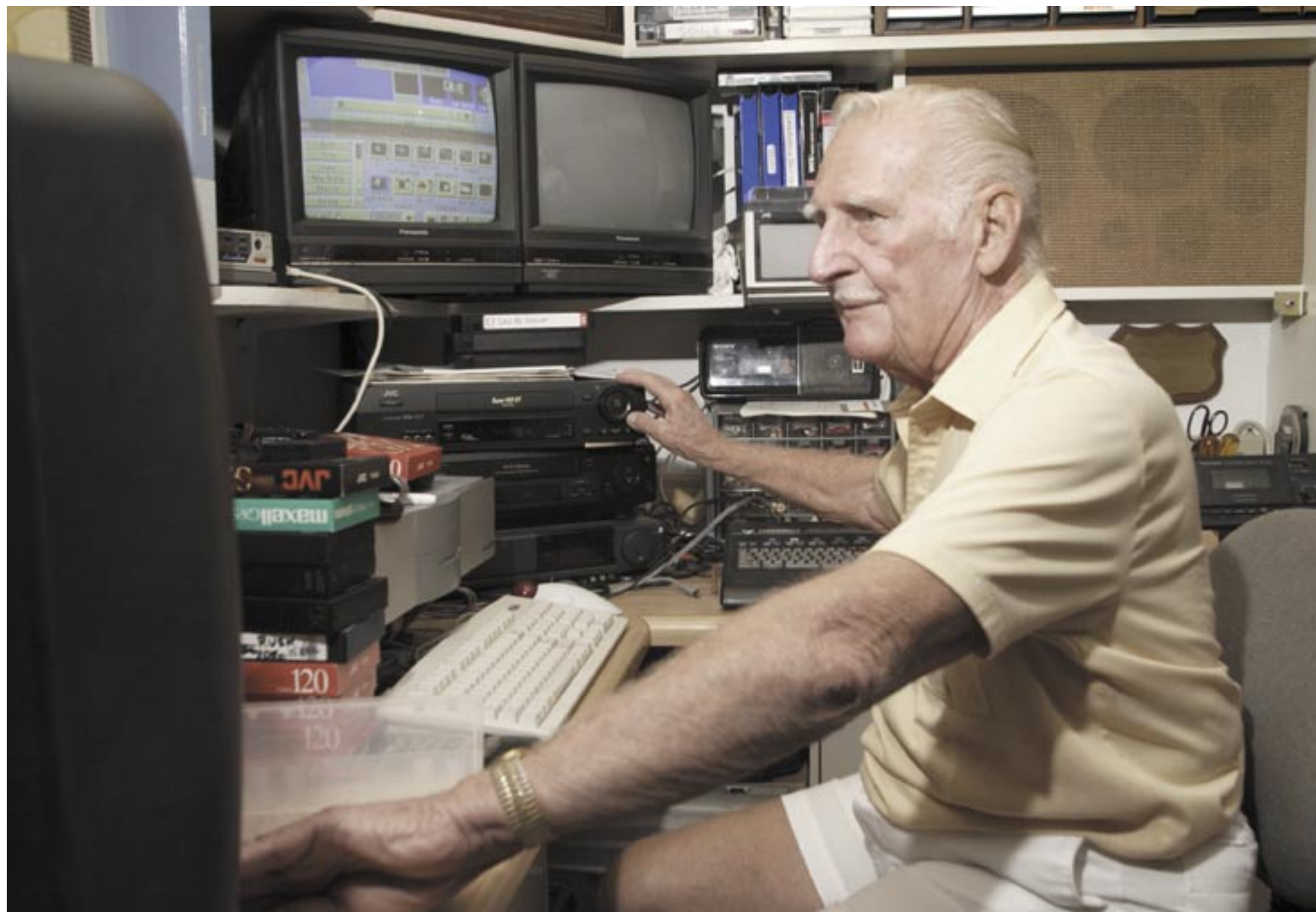


# EYES *in the* SKY

*Having been a videographer for more than 70 years, Doug Morrell can say he's "been there and done that" — and he has the video to prove it.*

by 2nd Lt. Adrienne Michele  
opening photo by Master Sgt. Lono Kollars



**O**ur planes were set on fire; it was a sad affair. We had to grab our parachutes and bail right out of there. We dove out through the hatches — it was the worst of times. We hit the ground eight hundred miles behind enemy lines!

Dozens of veterans sing these words, karaoke-style, at their prisoner-of-war reunions each year.

The German troops were waiting to take us on the ground; they hauled us into Bucharest and walked us through the town. The people jeered and shouted — they spit as we passed by. We thought that in those city streets, we were sure to die.

Leading them in the simple tune is Doug Morrell, who wrote the song — and produced the ka-

raoke presentation — based on the experiences he and other prisoners had in 1943 and 1944.

Morrell is a retired chief master sergeant whom you might say has done it all over a 30-year military career. He served in World War II as a combat cameraman and flew 32 combat missions before being shot down over the "Iron Gates" of Romania. He evaded the enemy by walking across Yugoslavia and Albania for 27 days and bribing

**Doug Morrell's first motion picture project**, which documented a lawsuit, earned him \$10 — quite a prize for a 12-year-old in 1931. At 84 years old, the retired chief master sergeant still produces videos at home. He uses digital cameras and edits with a computer-based system. Mostly it's for his enjoyment. "Then, of course," he said, "I sell a few." His experiences in World War II, Korea and Vietnam — including being shot down twice in Europe and once in Vietnam — helped make him a huge influence on the combat camera career field.



by Sgt. R.S. Parrish

an Albanian fisherman for a ride to Italy.

Back in action, he was flying his fifth raid over the Ploesti, Romania, oil fields when he was shot down again.

“‘Oh, no! Here we go again!’ That’s exactly what I said when I bailed out,” he said. “I was really thinking about having to walk back again.”

He parachuted to the ground. This time, the Germans were waiting. He spent four-and-a-half months as a POW in Bucharest before the advancing Russian army freed him and other captured troops.

### Sharing his experience

Almost 60 years later, Morrell tells these stories from the safety of his living room in Highland, Calif. He’s been retired from the Air Force since 1974. A chuckle escapes from under his white moustache when he talks about how he stays young.

“Being a critiquer, a crew chief, a director of photography and everything else, I’ve had so much contact with the young ones,” he said. “I think that’s what keeps you young more than anything else. And I’ve only lived a third of my life — hard to believe!”

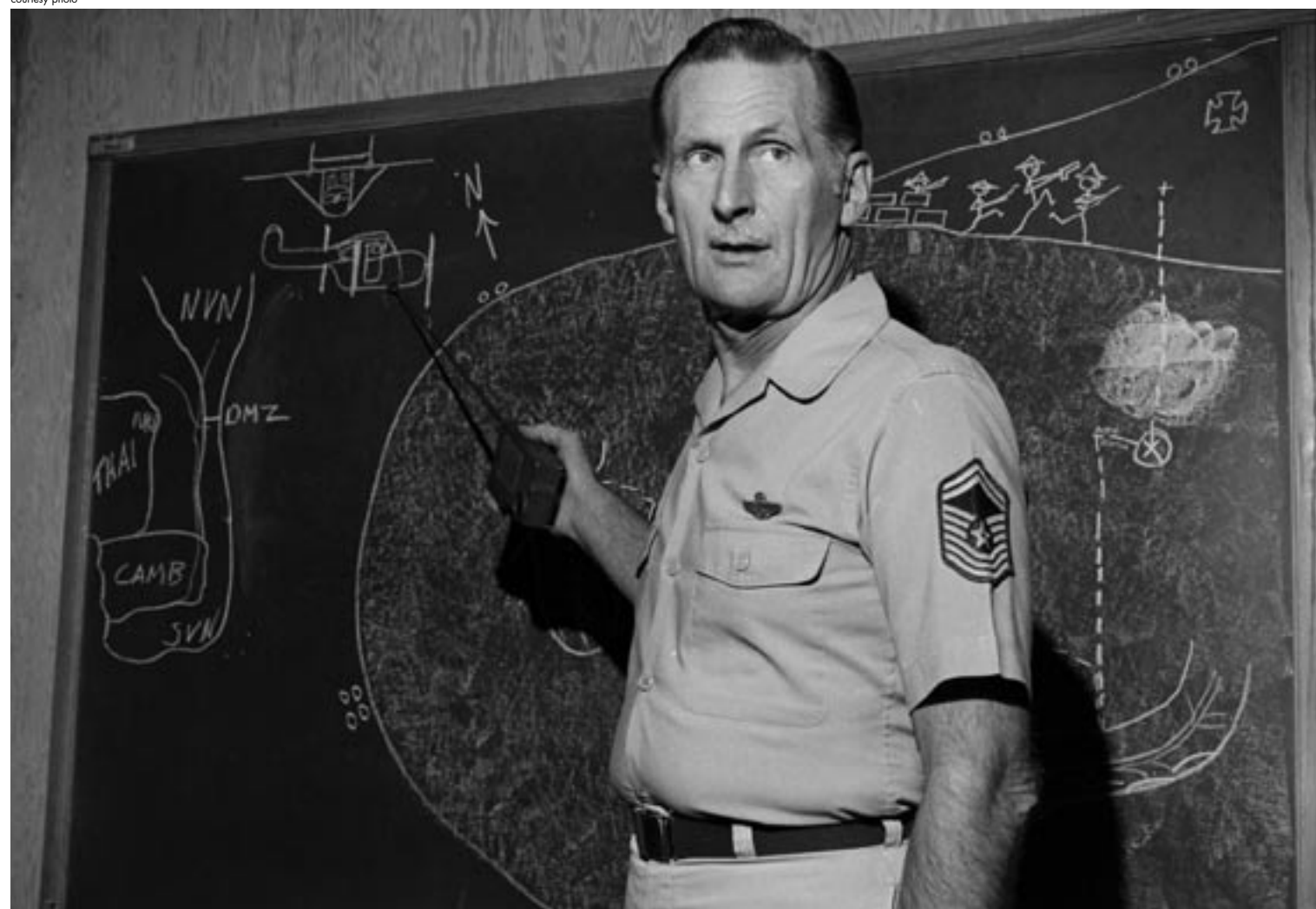
Even at 84, he’s on top of his game. He keeps fit in a bird-shaped, tiled pool he and his wife of 55 years, Dorothy, dug by hand in the backyard. Inside the house, he has his own production studio crammed into one room.

“I’ve got the whole dog-and-pony show in there,” he said. The setup includes a stand-alone, nonlinear editing system and an organ-keyboard combination. He pens his own music for his productions so he doesn’t have to worry about copyrights. And, of course, he still shoots his own video.

He regularly attends photography seminars, usually as a critiquer. He’s seen a lot of changes since he was in uniform behind the camera. In the last 20 years, “MTV” has defined the “new” video

**Two months shy of his 50th birthday,** Morrell was picked up by American forces just nine hours after bailing out over the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. Using his survival radio, he called in a rescue team and directed fire on several anti-aircraft guns in the area. His pilot wasn’t as fortunate and spent four years in captivity. “He still owes me a landing from that flight,” Morrell said.

courtesy photo



style. “I still can’t get used to all these fast-flash commercials and stuff,” he said with disdain.

And technology has advanced, too. Now, editing is done on nonlinear editing units, so the editor can add special effects and see the whole layout of his project at once. This “nonlinear” method has replaced “linear,” or tape-to-tape, where an editor had to put the pieces together in order, starting at the beginning. But Morrell thinks the bells and whistles can detract from the video’s message.

“Since new advances come in all the time, [younger cameramen] want to use everything. We get nonlinear editors and what happens? They’ve gotta use every single effect available while they’re editing. Special effects, no straight cuts.”

Chief Master Sgt. Thomas Hare, chief enlisted manager of the 1st Combat Camera Squadron at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., has been to a

**Morrell taught combat survival to aircrews at Norton Air Force Base, Calif., in the early 1970s.** “I figure, after what I went through out there, I might as well give good advice to someone else,” he said. “It worked for me.” Although he evaded enemy forces in Vietnam and after his first shoot-down in World War II, he was captured after bailing out over Romania in 1944. “They marched us through the streets of Bucharest,” he said. He was in captivity for four months.

critique session with Morrell. “He was very tough when it came to critiquing,” he said. “It toughened you up so you weren’t worried about your feelings, but rather getting what you need to tell the story.”

Hare said Morrell encourages videographers to get back to basics: the point of pictures is still the story. “It doesn’t mean a thing if you don’t have a story,” Morrell said.

### A different world

Morrell’s story doesn’t end in Romania. He



spent some recovery time in California before being assigned to a special project in the Pacific theater. When he was briefed that he'd be on the Enola Gay to document a bombing mission over Hiroshima, Japan, he was ready. But at the last minute, plans changed.

"The day we were supposed to take off, they decided they didn't want any cameramen aboard, so they gave a camera to the navigator," Morrell said. "And you saw what they got — about three seconds of an atomic cloud."

But even without being on that flight, Morrell has shaped combat camera and the Air Force.

He was a key ingredient in developing airmen who came into combat camera. Master Sgt. Keith Brown, noncommissioned officer in charge of the 1st, worked with Morrell on a daily basis as an airman at Norton Air Force Base, Calif.

"He was pretty instrumental in teaching us younger airmen, especially since he had all that experience, including being shot down three times," Brown said. "He played a huge role in the video career field."

For example, Morrell was sent to document how enemy ME-109 and FW-190 aircraft were targeting allied planes. Allied pilots saw them coming in from the sun, but the motion pictures that he and other combat cameramen shot told a different story.

"We were waiting for them to come in from the sun, and we found out that they would dive through us, then go out and come around and attack from behind and below. We documented that, and the next day we shot down about 300 fighters," Morrell explained. "We changed our tactics because of documentation."

Now, combat cameramen don't get as close to the fight. Even as recently as Vietnam, photographers followed fighters and bombers into battle. Warfighters have precision-guided munitions, and pilots — as well as videographers — don't get as close to targets. Combat camera has to tell the Air Force story from farther out. "It makes our job a lot different," he said.

And today's combat camera has to change accordingly.

"The thing Doug used to teach us was how to get the complete story — how to get what you need to tell the story," Hare said. "Folks are just more creative in getting what they need to tell the story."

Especially with the popularity of embedded media, could combat camera fall by the wayside? Morrell doesn't think so. He said embedded journalists did a good job in Operation Iraqi Freedom, but they can't replace what combat camera does. Especially with classified projects and conditions that only airmen are trained for. There's room for both military and civilian storytellers.

"We have to document it for not only historical purposes, but operational evaluation and that sort of thing," he said. "Anything the military's involved with, we've been there."

### Seeing differently

When Morrell joined the military in 1939, his physical examination uncovered a disability that disqualified him from getting a direct commission as a lieutenant in the Navy. He's colorblind — a green-brown deficiency. The Army, however, saw it as an asset. Morrell can distinguish between certain shades of brown and green, which allowed him to see certain camouflage.

"If you cut a limb on a tree, 20 minutes later I can tell you that [limb's] been cut. So if you took that limb and tried to cover a Jeep or a gun with it, I could tell it wasn't [natural]," he explained.

His "deficiency" uncovered two camouflaged German submarines near Venice, Italy. Allied forces destroyed them the next day.

After the war, he left the Army Air Forces and worked as a civilian, taking still photographs until the Korean War. Times were tough, and he knew that combat camera offered good pay and involved flying — something he loved. But during the war, he became a loadmaster aboard the C-124 Globemaster II. The career diversion lasted for only three months before he left the work he didn't really like and secured a special assignment as a photo advisor to the Alabama Air National Guard.

In 1969, two months before his 50th birthday and in the thick of his third war — Vietnam — Morrell was documenting a sensor drop over the Ho Chi Minh trail when he was shot down again. "But they were shooting at us on the way down this time," he said.

Nine hours later, with the help of 34 aircraft, he was picked up by an HH-3 Jolly Green Giant. His pilot wasn't as fortunate — he spent four years as a POW in Hanoi, North Vietnam. "I still call him up every February 28th and say, 'You owe me a landing!'" Morrell said.

courtesy photo



During his 30-year military career, he also shot video of Russian reconnaissance missions in Iceland, flying F-102 Delta Daggers and followed three presidents around Latin America documenting U.S. civic actions.

"[They] got re-elected that way," he said. "I got all those good letters from them and made chief. I went down there as a tech. sergeant, and I came back in barely five years with a line number for chief. Of course, those letters helped a little!"

But Morrell's greatest legacy is most felt within combat camera. Brown attended the first class of videographers at the Military Motion Media Studies program at Syracuse University, N.Y., where a print photography program already existed. Morrell helped establish the video program and hand-picked Brown to attend. "He played a huge role in the video career field," Brown said.

With more than seven decades of experience shooting motion pictures — he produced his first

**Morrell rests after a morning mission over Italy** before heading back out for an afternoon flight. During World War II, he documented combat missions over Germany, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Yugoslavia, France and Romania. His green-brown visual color deficiency also helped him identify two German submarines hidden under camouflage near Venice, Italy. Allied forces destroyed them the next day.

video at age 12 — he still speculates what the future holds. "I expect someday for everyone to be shooting video," he said. "Digital, of course — but video. And they'll be able to pick out the frames they want [for still photos]."

Naysayers scoff that scenario is still far off. But Morrell has seen change firsthand: "Well, you know how they used to talk. 'Oh, it'll never get like Kodachrome!'"

It did get better than the then-premier developing process. But through the changes, Morrell was shooting video, telling the story. He continues that legacy today, even with a karaoke video — the songs plunked off his own keyboard. 🎵